

9 September 1953

Memorandum for: The Director of Central Intelligence

Subject: Use of the Polygraph.

The following is a quotation from the Senate Appropriations hearings of the Department of Justice setting forth J. Edgar Hoover's opinion of the polygraph:

"Sen. McCarran. At some point in your discussion will it be convenient for you to discuss your views of the so-called lie detector?"

"Mr. Hoover. I would like to discuss it right now, Senator.

"Sen. McCarran. On the floor of the Senate some have said you didn't have much use for it and some of them said you were differently quoted.

"Chairman Bridges. There is quite a controversy, as Senator McCarran said.

"Mr. Hoover. I will be very glad to give my views of it, Senator. The name "lie detector" is a complete misnomer. The machine used is not a lie detector. It shows the variations of your blood pressure and of your emotions. The person who operates the machine is the lie detector by reason of his interpretations. The machine technically is known as the polygraph. The man operating it must be extremely skilled and must be conservative and objective. He must be able to properly interpret the recordings made. However, whenever the human element enters into an interpretation of anything, there is always a variance. I would never accept the conclusion of a lie detector as proof of innocence or guilt. All that it can be called is a psychological aid.

"For instance, I have in mind defalcations in banks. There was a case where one or two defalcations had been reported. We never use the lie detector except upon agreement of the employees. Two employees immediately admitted they had committed this defalcation and 11 others admitted other defalcations which the bank did not know of and which had not been reported. That was psychological.

"I saw the lie detector used in a kidnaping case which I handled some years ago in which a young man in his early twenties was picked up. He was quite a nervous and high-strung individual. The lie detector indicated he was guilty of kidnaping and murdering a child. We were not satisfied to accept that. We tried it on another suspect. He proved to be as innocent as any man could be. Five days later I received a full confession from the second suspect whom the lie detector proved to be innocent and he went to the chair and paid the penalty.

"That is why I have said I do not have confidence in it as specifically proving anything. It is a psychological aid but as you and I both know, there are many persons who are highly excitable and highly emotional, who get very nervous when they have committed no crime. You see witnesses who come before congressional committees who are excited. Others are calm and calloused and are guilty of the things the committee is inquiring into.

"Sen. McCarran. Another agency or CIA has said that to detect perversion this lie detector was very useful.

"Mr. Hoover. There will be differences of opinion. I personally would not want to accept solely the evidence of what the operator of a lie detector says the lie detector shows in proving that a man was or was not a sex deviate. There would have to be additional supporting information available. Accusing a person of sex deviation is a very serious charge to make against an individual and every step should be taken to insure against falsely charging any individual of such activity. In many cases, psychologically, the man might confess because of a guilty conscience. There are other sex perverts who are rather calloused and who

might not show such reaction. The machine might not indicate that that person was a sex deviate and yet he might be one. I would never want to convict or acquit a man solely on the evidence of the lie detector because there is so much of a variance in regard to the human element and interpretation.

"Sen. Ellender. The appraisal of Mr. Hoover's views as to the lie detector made by Senator Taft on the floor seems to be correct. He said what you are now saying.

"Sen. Magnuson. Two doctors can look at your blood pressure at the same time and come to different conclusions but they can be off. They always do.

"Mr. Hoover. It is the same with a psychiatrist. You have criminal cases and you have a psychiatrist for the defense, one for the prosecution; one says the man is sane and one says the man is insane."

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1 - DD/A  
1 - Security  
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